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## **Challenges and Opportunities in Combing the Competences of Formal Education and NGOs for Teaching Sustainability**

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### **Abstract**

Although the decade for Education for Sustainable Development has been well promoted in Germany it still finds itself in a rather marginal position, both in the formal and in the informal educational sector. This is at least partly due to the status it is given in the political debate that leads to different expectations by different actors who operate in different frameworks. Thus teachers in formal education will have to take general requirements of education for citizenship into consideration while NGOs are often focused on improving environments and living conditions. Nonetheless there are numerous efforts for the two to join forces. These efforts can be fruitful, if actors on both sides understand the needs and restrictions the other side faces. In this article we want to explore the opportunities and challenges of cooperation between the formal and informal educational sector with a view of giving partners a chance to better use their often scarce resources.

### **Keywords**

NGOs, Cooperation With Schools, Content, Sustainability, Pedagogical Process

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In December 2002 the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development, which lasted from 2005 to 2014. According to the lead agency responsible for the coordination of the project, the UNESCO, its aim was to foster the integration of “the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning” (UNESCO 2005, 6). As the decade is now over, this seems like a good point in time to reflect on its potentials at the intersection of the formal and informal educational sectors as well as possible challenges ahead.

Sustainable development in itself is a contested term. So much so, that by some it is seen as an empty box (Nikel & Reid 2006). The uncertainty about the significance of the term may derive from the fact that, while it has its origins in protest movements against environmental deterioration and the exploitation of what at that time were so-called Third World countries, it is now a term often used to transfer responsibility for sustainable development from state to individual efforts (Wolf 2006). Such privatisation has led to the term becoming a marketing instrument for goods that are awarded all kinds of labels proofing the sustainability of either their production or their consumption (SEPA 2005). But this has not necessarily led to behavioural changes as the political, social and economic frameworks in which people make decision may at the same time promote and impede sustainable conduct (Curren 2009). In which way the term itself is understood may hence vary according to its status as a political idea of protest, of individual behaviour or as a marketing instrument. How it is interpreted not only depends on individual or societal choices, but on the way the term has been integrated in the political system itself.

France, for example, has codified sustainable development in an amendment to its constitution in 2004 (Dubois-Maury 2004). Article 6 of this amendment simply reads: ‘Public policies have to promote sustainable development. To this effect, they reconcile the protection and the exploitation of the environment, economic development and social progress’. The vagueness of the expression of the idea is comparable to that of the proclamation of liberty as a fundamental right and enables people to discuss and develop it (Nikel & Reid 2006). Hence French academics have been engaging in debates on what sustainability means and how it can best be implemented (e. g. Brunel 2008, Burbage 2013). In the same vein, the GeoCapabilities project, in the formulation of its second hypothetical geo-capability – ‘Identifying and exercising one’s choices in how to live based on worthwhile distinctions with regard to citizenship and sustainability’ – in a broad, yet meaningful sense does not expect teachers and teacher educators to transmit the idea to their national context, but to discuss and transfer it as is fit in their respective frameworks (Solem, Lambert & Tani 2013).

In Germany the situation is quite different. The idea of sustainable development has not been explicitly codified in the constitution (Krukowski 2010). Instead article 20, which in its first paragraph covers the implementation of a democratic and social state has been extended by a supplementary article (20a) on environmental protection, that proclaims that ‘the state, in responsibility to future generations, protects the natural environment and the animals’. The formulation of this paragraph narrows the room for

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discussion and action (Möllers 2009), so that the debate often no longer is on whether certain actions can be understood as being sustainable, but rather on what people have to do in order to achieve sustainability. Consequently, in the educational sector the lack of a commitment to the idea of sustainable development by the state leads to a perception of contradicting values, where educators are encouraged to convince young people of the necessities of sustainable lifestyles while the state itself may follow unsustainable policies (Wolf 2006). Educators both in the formal and in the informal sector feel left alone, and to counterbalance that feeling some consider joining force. These endeavors are sometimes supported by newer curricula as in the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg, where schools are invited to seek collaborations with NGOs when teaching sustainability or global learning (BE-BB 2014). Unfortunately this raises new, often unforeseen challenges.

The situation of educators in the formal sector in this context is comparable to that of politically engaged academic scientists, who have to find ways to combine the production of scientifically accepted knowledge with political engagement (Derickson & Routledge 2015). Triangulating the research question as proposed by Derickson and Routledge is certainly a promising way to resolve this problem, nonetheless for teacher educators the challenge of collaboration is often amplified by the fact, that (future) teachers and political activists seem to have a common political interest in teaching people, but may realize it on the basis of completely different conceptual backgrounds (Wolf 2006). Collaboration, which may make sense from a political point of view, is thus not always easy and hence rather the exception than the norm (Hemmer, Bagoly-Simó, Fischer 2013).

In this article we would like to explore some of the challenges and opportunities of collaborations between teachers, teacher students and teacher educators from formal education and NGOs engaged in education for sustainable development. To do so, in the first section, we will make use of Marsden's model of curriculum planning (Marsden 1997, see Fig. 1) as it allows us to observe the collaboration from different perspectives, namely those of the subject content that is the basis for the proposal by Derickson and Routledge (2015), the educational processes that were identified as one of the problematic aspects of NGOs by Wolf (2006), and the social purpose of fostering sustainability that in Germany is not explicitly codified either in the constitution or in the educational laws of the federal states.

## **Policy Background**

In Germany curriculum makers, schools and NGOs have reacted to the proclamation of the decade and made some efforts to integrate education for sustainable development into their agendas. As Germany does not have one national curriculum but (almost) sixteen different federal curricula for each subject and each type of school respectively, we will here confine our argument to the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg, which coordinate their curriculum planning and thus they have practically identical curricula. The following examples are set in these two federal states, with the first study focusing on a Berlin NGO while the second study relates to teacher students in Brandenburg collaborating with NGOs from Brandenburg and Berlin.

Regardless of the subject in question, all S1-curricula (year 7 to 10; age 12 to 16) that were in force in Brandenburg, and thus also Berlin, at the time of the investigation are preceded by four pages of general statements about education and its aims. This introduction includes a paragraph on sustainable behaviour that requires teachers to educate students in a way that they will develop a lifestyle consistent with their responsibility for future generations. This, according to the curriculum, entails that students are able to analyse and evaluate developments that are not sustainable. To reach this aim they should be offered learning opportunities about environmental, economic and social issues with special reference to transport and mobility (MBJS 2008a). Apart from that, some subjects, such as political education, do not mention sustainability anywhere else in the curriculum (MBJS 2008b) and others, such as biology, offer a very restrictive view equalling sustainability to persistent environmental protection (MBJS 2008c). The latter thus reduce people's decision-making to natural science argumentations, which has proved to be insufficient to understand complex political, social and economic issues (Stewart 2011). Only the subject of geography makes sustainability a topic in its own right (MBJS 2008a). The respective paragraph is entitled 'Global Futures and Ways to Implement Sustainability Locally and Globally' and covers aspects such as climate change, increasing scarcity of resources and environmental protection. The topic is one of ten themes that are covered during the four year period and is taught in year 10. It was included in the curriculum as the subject of geography feels a special obligation to promote the preservation of the earth through sustainable development.

NGOs in Brandenburg have also taken up the challenge. Before we take a closer look at their activities it seems necessary to define what is meant by an NGO in this context. The term NGO implies that it relates to organisations that are non-governmental, but it usually also means that the organisations are non-profit (Reuter 2008), thus excluding all efforts that may be made by private enterprises to promote education for sustainable development. This definition still leaves us with a great number of quite different organisations like trade unions, business associations, churches and private citizen groups. In a more restricted understanding NGOs are further defined as following a course that does not only benefit their members, but also, for example, people in other countries or future generations, and as being led by a certain set of shared values (*ibid.*). This would include giants like Greenpeace and small local groups that may run a fair trade shop or organise help for HIV-patients in a specific country.

Since 2004 NGOs with a focus on education have been organising a two to three week event called BREBIT (Brandenburger Entwicklungspolitische Bildungs- and Informationstage, 2015) in November each year. It offers special workshops, projects and debates to be held at schools all over the federal state. Since 2007 the themes for each year have been chosen in accordance with yearly themes promoted by the national committee for the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development. These themes were cultural diversity (2007), water (2008), energy (2009), money (2010), cities (2011), nutrition (2012), mobility (2013) and justice (2014). The theme for 2015, the first year after the termination of the decade, was poverty and wealth. Since 2014 the themes have been accompanied by questions, starting with 'The world of tomorrow:

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How just may it be?" and followed by "A good life for everyone. How are poverty and wealth connected?" in 2015 (see: [www.brebit.org](http://www.brebit.org)). Notwithstanding the huge effort that has been invested in these activities, NGOs are often small and have only limited personal and financial resources. Also those that are not focussed on education itself are often project-centred and only use a fraction of their financial budget for campaigning or educational purposes – in concrete figures this means that just one percent of the total resources are used for campaigning and only a half percent of the funding received from the Department of Economic Cooperation and Development is spent on education (Reuter 2008).

This situation implies that despite the efforts undertaken by the different groups and organisations education for sustainable development still finds itself in a rather marginal position in both fields. In formal education there is a marked gap between the proclaimed importance of the issues of sustainable development and their implementation in the context of citizen education, and in the context of the NGOs the focus is more on sustainable development itself with education being at best a means to an end. Moreover, both formal education and NGO are lacking funds and thus expect the other partner to provide resources or collaborate for free. The structural differences between the two systems often lead to schools demanding input from NGOs just before the holiday break and NGOs viewing school education as a forum for agitation, both of which are not necessarily helpful to follow a common cause.

## **Methodology**

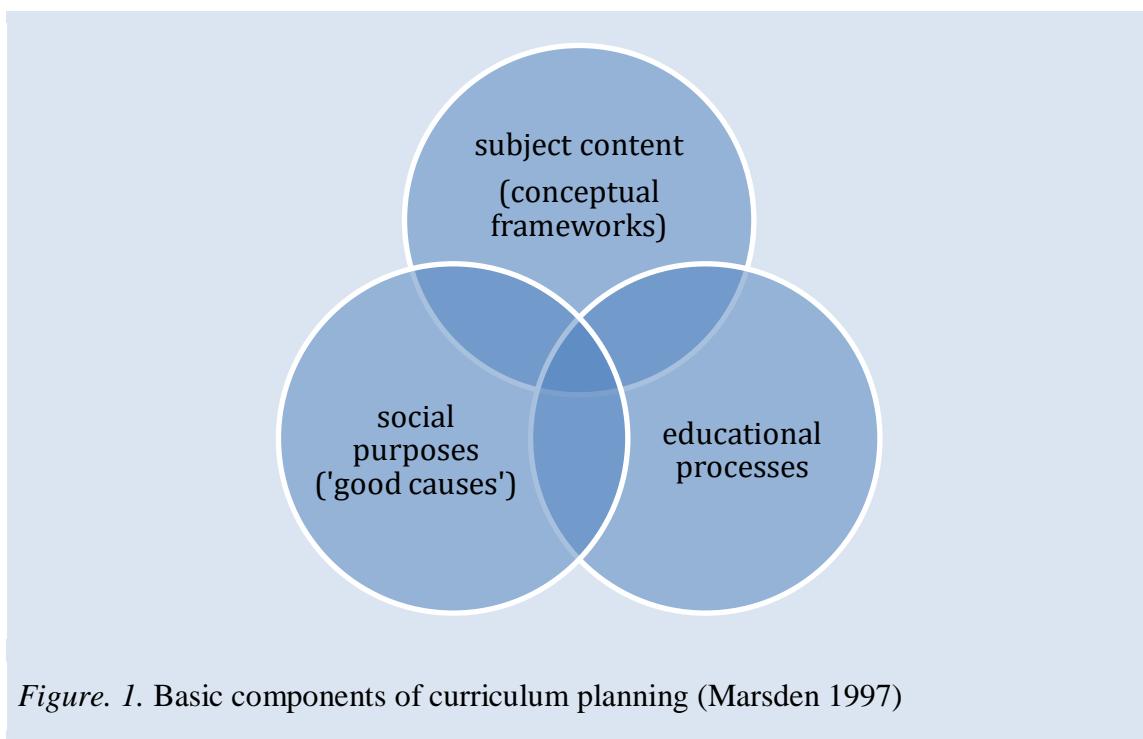
The findings described below are based on two independent studies that have been conducted in a common framework at the University of Potsdam. The first study, a yet unpublished BA-thesis (Schulz, 2012), is based on the feedback to mostly in-school courses offered by an NGO that specialises in global learning. Although the courses were held for students, the feedback was only asked from the teachers accompanying the students. From the NGO's point of view this might have been the most efficient method as over the period of one year they held 202 courses and the sheer mass of feedback from each student might have overwhelmed them. From the point of view of research the teachers' feedback is of interest as it gives insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the informal educational sector from the perspective of professional educationists. The questionnaire that was used for the feedback contained five questions: What did the teachers like or dislike? What goals did they want to achieve by running this course? What competences have the students acquired? What did the students like or dislike? What was the teachers' impression of the formal aspects of the cooperation? In relation to the research question of this paper answers to the first question were analysed together with administrative data on the topics of courses offered. Overall 106 questionnaires have been returned, which cover 52% of all courses held. As the questionnaire wanted to give teachers the opportunity to freely express their viewpoints, all five questions were open questions. It was thus necessary for the researcher to categorize the answers. This was done using typological analysis (Mayring 2002), which allowed to group ideas in a meaningful and significant way.

The second study is based on the cooperation between a university course on education for sustainable development for MA student teachers and local NGOs. The course intended to give students the opportunity not only to think about and discuss the concept of education for sustainable development, but also to expand their teaching abilities in the field. To achieve the latter aim, students were asked to cooperate with an NGO to develop teaching materials that the NGO might later use. During the whole process the students were asked to keep logs that give insight into their reflections on the collaboration (Malthouse & Roffey-Barentsen 2009). The course was set out for ten students only, which was partly due to the difficulty of finding NGOs who were willing to cooperate. Still these ten places were not taken, as on the side of the students demand was not very high. In the end eight students participated in and also finished the course. Their logs have been analysed using interpretative methods. Here the aim was not to categorize answers to produce quantitative data. For this not only would the numbers have been too small, but also the aim of the logs was rather to understand how learning took place than to evaluate its outcome.

## **Findings**

### **Theoretical framework**

Marsden developed his model of curriculum planning to discuss the role of subject content in the geography classroom. The model is extremely simple which makes it a useful instrument for comparing the perspectives of formal education and NGOs when it comes to education for sustainable development. Marsden claims that there are three basic components of curriculum making: the subject content, the pedagogical process and the social purposes followed (Fig. 1).



The subject content is not so much defined by the amount of facts transmitted, but by ‘the state of the art conceptual frameworks of the subject’ (Marsden 1997, 242). Hence the subject content has to relate back to the academic discipline and try to transform the theories developed there in a way that makes them accessible for students and the wider public. The pedagogical process is concerned with the needs of the students and their understandings as well as with teaching strategies that enable the students’ learning and the promotion of skills such as analysing or discussing problems. This component relates mainly, but not exclusively, to the general education courses offered at universities. The social purposes are described as the ‘good causes’ (*ibid.*) that people follow at a certain time in a certain society. For geography teachers this has often been a concern with the protection of the environment or with global issues such as hunger and poverty. According to Marsden a good curriculum has to succeed in keeping these three components at a reasonable balance.

Comparing NGOs and the formal educational system with respect to the subject content one marked difference is evident. While the formal educational system is organised by subjects that are each more or less related to an academic discipline, NGOs often focus on a specific topic like the protection of the great bustard, the building of sand dams or the integration of asylum seekers. These different perspectives entail different kinds of expert knowledge. The geography teacher for example may be able to enhance the understanding of an issue by using geographical concepts such as place, space, scale, interaction, diversity, perception and representation as well as change (Taylor 2008, Uhlenwinkel 2013a, b). In contrast, the NGO activist may have experience in relation to the implementation of specific measures in specific countries and a broader and deeper knowledge of specific issues as he does not restrict his interest to a school subject (Reuter 2008). This constellation may lead to an extremely fruitful discussion, but may also make cooperation difficult, depending on the openness of the people involved (Gathercole, Prinzler 2013).

### **Differences and similarities in the perspectives of the formal education system and NGOs**

The evaluation of the courses of the NGO shows slightly different aspects than those that would be expected following the Marsden model, but they relate to the same problem: the difference is due to the fact that the geography curricula in Brandenburg, and thus also Berlin, at the time when the courses took place, were extremely traditional focussing on regional geography (Uhlenwinkel 2013c). This implies that teachers had to teach continents and countries starting with Asia, then going on to Africa, followed by the Americas and finally leading to Australia (MBJS, 2008). Thus, geographical concepts are not mentioned at all and consequently they are not taught (Schulz 2011). Yet, the problem described above still largely remains the same because country knowledge does not necessarily imply themes important in the field of education for sustainable development. This gap becomes obvious when looking at the topics of the courses of the NGO that teachers preferred. Topics like (organic) agriculture and country specific questions that fit well into the geography curricula of the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg were highly demanded, while issues that may be more characteristic for a discussion on sustainable development such as globalisation,

intercultural learning or cooperation in international development were less prominent among the courses held (Schulz 2012; see Fig. 2). It therefore seems to be important to try and bridge the gap between either of the two possible school perspectives on issues of sustainability and the NGOs' understanding of relevant topics.

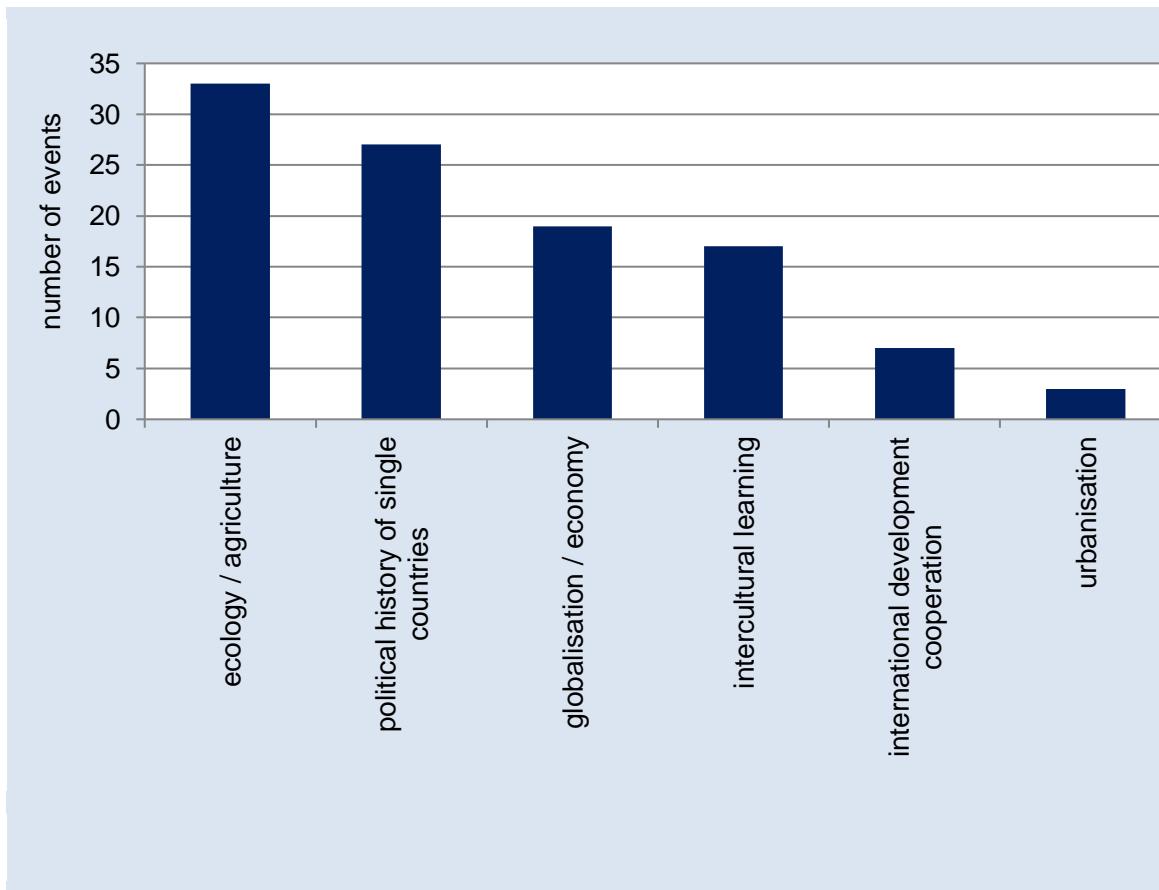
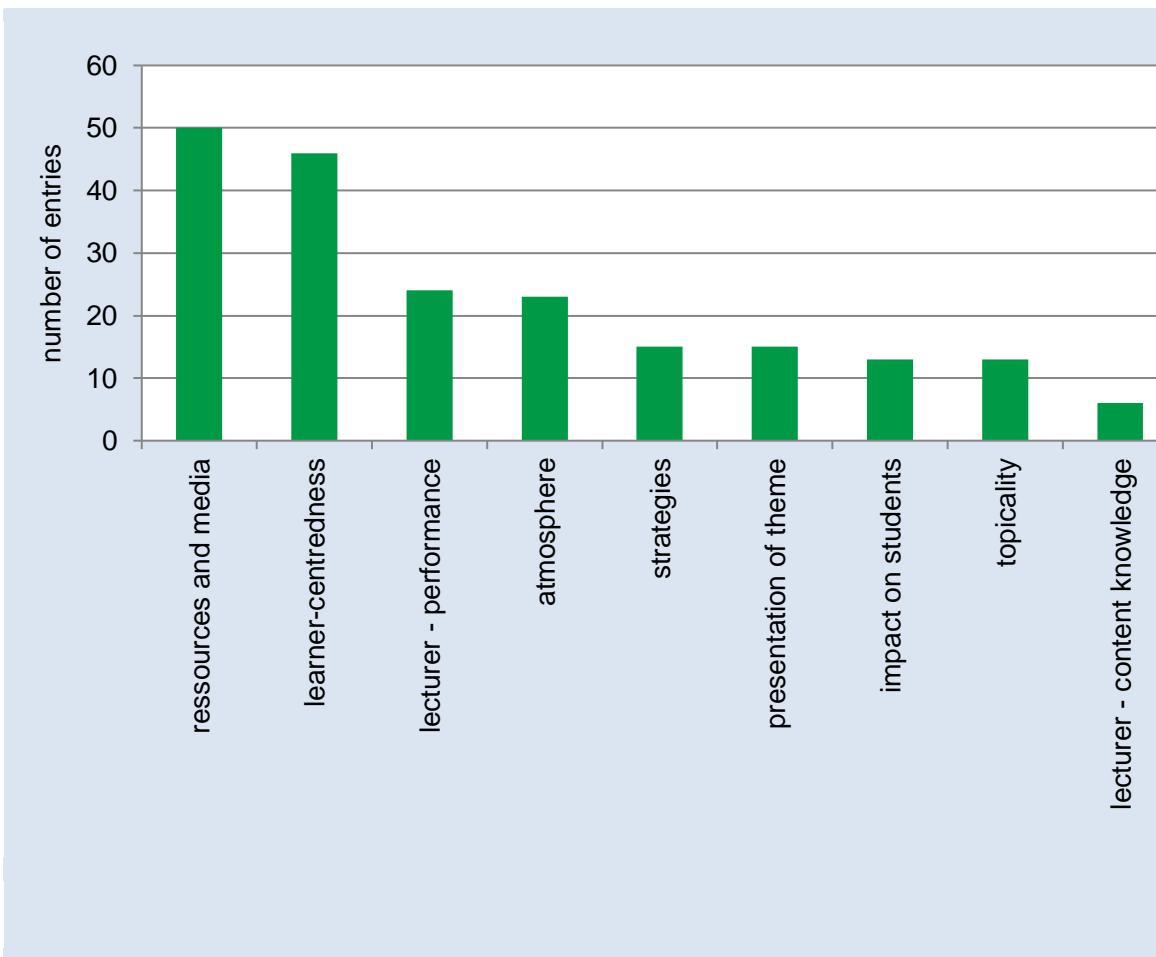


Figure 2. Themes of EPIZ-courses held in schools in 2010 (source: Schulz 2012, 23)

With respect to the pedagogical processes teachers and teacher training institutions are obviously the professionals as long as cognitive learning is concerned. They reflect on competences to be obtained and on strategies that may help students obtaining them. In so far, they may be of great help for NGOs when they decide to use their expert knowledge to develop strategies especially tailored to the needs of an education for sustainable development. A good example for this approach is the way Tide~'s Development Compass Rose was created (Tide~ 2003). Many German NGOs that are not specifically concerned with education unfortunately reject the idea of cognitive learning and stress emotional learning instead. They try to involve children and young people by making them weave baskets, plant tomatoes, care for animals or experience a wood blindfolded. This approach very often leads to a feel good factor that may be welcomed by some teachers especially at the end of the term, but may not necessarily lead to sustainable learning outcomes. Although there is an obvious ideological gap

here, this may be overcome by creative minds that succeed in turning cognitive content into meaningful action (Joppich 2010).

Our research on the perception of courses of the NGO by teachers clearly shows that the gap between the teachers' professional knowledge of pedagogical processes and the teaching strategies employed by the NGOs is strongly felt by the educators. Although their overall feedback is by far more positive than negative it is noteworthy that teaching strategies rank rather low in the positive feedback (Fig. 3), while the lack of activating teaching strategies ranks highest in the negative feedback (Fig. 4).



*Figure 3.* Positive feedback to EPIZ-courses in 2010 (source: Schulz 2012, 39)

Similar differences can be observed in relation to the social purposes. NGOs that focus on a certain issue or specific projects do of course have social purposes. They also need to be deeply involved in processes of agenda setting, risk avoidance and the maintenance of strategic alliances (Reuter 2008). These strategic alliances may include cooperations with schools as it allows the NGOs to promote their issues. Teachers on the other hand are obliged to be politically neutral in their lessons. This obligation has been codified in the Beutelsbach Consensus in 1976. It formulates three principles a teacher has to observe when teaching political issues: (1) he is prohibited to overpower

a student and force him to take over the teacher's view, (2) issues that are discussed controversially in society have to be discussed controversially in lessons and (3) the student must be given the chance to develop his own understanding of the issues and voice his own opinion (see: <http://www.bpb.de>, 2011). Clearly, this obligation has a great potential for hindering teachers to cooperate with NGOs that are focused on promoting their issues. On the other hand NGOs can use their image as being reliant and trustworthy (Reuter 2008) as a counter argument, especially as education for sustainable development is promoted by the curricula in question in this paper. This situation may lead to teachers finding themselves in a double-bind situation, having to promote intellectual freedom and a rather moral-driven perspective of sustainable development at the same time. Still this issue has to be considered when trying to start joint projects.

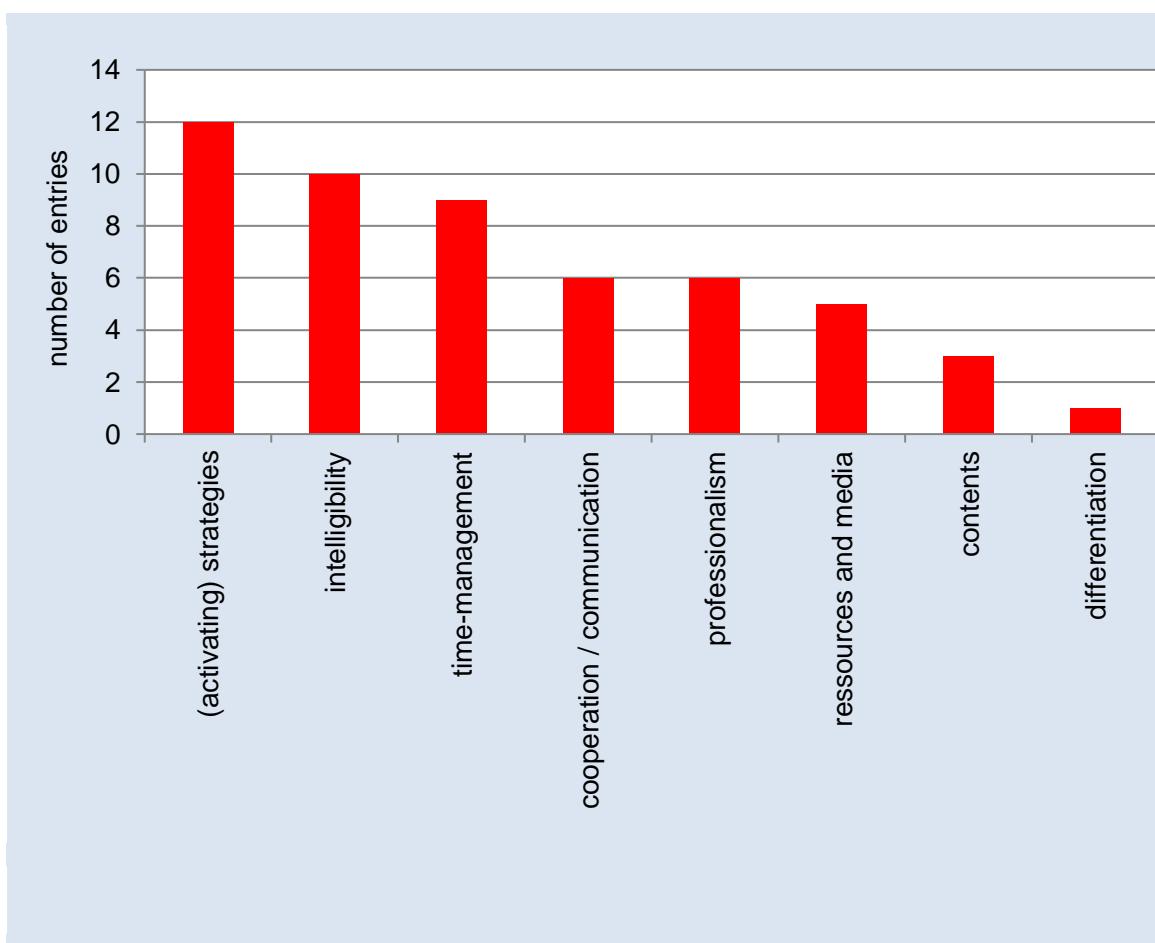


Figure 4. Negative feedback to EPIZ-courses in 2010 (source: Schulz 2012, 44)

Obviously there are fundamental differences in perspective between NGOs and the formal education system in relation to all three components. Yet, there is also a marked similarity which is the aim to acquaint young people with ideas concerning sustainable development. To do so successfully both partners need to understand that the competences of the other are not just different, but may enrich their own work.

### **Student teachers developing lesson proposals in cooperation with NGOs**

In the summer term 2010 future geography teachers at Potsdam University were offered a project course unpretentiously entitled “Education for Sustainable Development”. It was run in collaboration with three NGOs, two of which were located in Berlin. The other was located in Potsdam itself. All three NGOs had different foci and backgrounds: BUNDjugend is the youth organisation of BUND, an NGO specialised in environmental issues such as oceans, biodiversity, nuclear power and mobility. Its youth organisation offers young people the opportunity to get involved in political discourse and action, and in that context it also focuses on education. The NGO has local groups all over Germany. EPIZ is the acronym for “Entwicklungs-politisches Bildungs- und Informationszentrum” which means as much as centre for development education and information (or Global Education Centre). It is located in Berlin and specialises in different fields of education such as workshops for the professional development for teachers or production of teaching materials. It focuses on development issues for instance human rights, fair trade and intercultural communication. Missio is a missionary organisation of the Catholic Church that supports churches in Africa, Asia and Oceania by training their professionals. In Germany they engage in educational work that emphasizes interreligious dialog, human rights and work for peace. All three NGOs were asked to name themes or topics they would like the teacher students to get involved with (Tab. 1).

Table 1

*Themes offered by NGOs and chosen by student teachers*

NGO	Themes or topics offered	Topics chosen
BUNDjugend	Culture and consumption	X
	Energy and resources	
	Food and agriculture	X
	Water	
EPIZ	Office work or Retail	X
	Oil	X
missio	Young people and violence (South Africa)	X
	Migration and pluralism in Nigeria	X
	Soy production in Brazil	X

To be admitted to the course the teacher students had to pass two other courses, one on innovative teaching strategies and another on the application of media in the geography classroom. The number of participants in the course was restricted to ten, but

there were hardly more applications anyway. When asked, students who decided against taking the course often said that to them sustainability appeared to be a rather complex topic which they did not feel fit to engage with or that a cooperation with an NGO seemed too time-consuming and asked for a level of engagement, they did not want to invest. In the end there were eight teacher students in the course, all of whom handed in teaching material including a theoretical background and a log in which they reflected the progression of their work. Two teacher students worked in a group. In the following paragraphs we will treat them as one entity to protect their anonymity as well as that of the NGO concerned.

Some themes were slightly reformulated during the cooperation. "Migration and pluralism in Nigeria" was broadened to encompass the whole of Africa and "Young people and violence" became "HIV in Africa". The teacher student who had the choice between "Office work" and "Retail" decided to work on retail rather than the office sector.

Four of the papers that were handed in by the teacher students were way above average in relation to quality as well as quantity of the work normally done. One, unfortunately, did not meet the standards. The other three were of mixed quality ranging from good to satisfactory. Of course, it may be asked whether these outcomes were strongly influenced by the NGOs the teacher students cooperated with. Or, to put it another way: Are teacher students disadvantaged, if the cooperation seems unsatisfactory? Taking the reflections of the logs as a feedback, there is no evidence that would support such an assumption. Overall the teacher students were extremely pleased with the cooperation. Only one teacher student said that, although the experience was worth the effort, he was disappointed by the feedback he received from the NGO. The teacher student who failed the course did give a rather positive feedback and admitted her own problems accomplishing the work. Interestingly enough she cooperated with the same NGO as one of the top teacher students. But although a dissatisfaction cooperation did not necessarily lead to failure, it still seems that in this group the more able teacher students profited more from the cooperation with an NGO than the others, as they knew how to use the opportunities offered to them.

When considering the teacher students' feedback in relation to the model of curriculum planning some of the differences described above surface and others seem less problematic. One of the problems that did not arise was the difference between the subject content knowledge that underlies geography as a school subject and content as understood by the NGOs. This may be due to the teacher students' not yet relating their course work to the curricula, but to their experience of the academic subject of geography, which in relation to the federal curricula in question here is a lot broader than school geography. Only in one instant did a teacher student say that he felt incapable of meeting the NGOs expectations as the NGO wanted to treat the topic from a range of different perspectives (music, chemistry etc.) and he himself felt comfortable only with geography and his second subject. As to the expert knowledge of the NGOs three teacher students said that they were provided with profound information that stimulated their thinking. In two of these cases this information was felt to be rather too

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specialised so that the teacher students were not able to use it to its full extend. Both of the students underlined that it was important though as it served as background knowledge which helped them decide on what to include or which illustrative examples to create. Apart from these three teacher students, all the others either researched the information needed by themselves or in two cases used little or no substantial information.

With respect to the pedagogical processes the three teacher students that felt they were provided with ample information also experienced themselves as the experts for teaching strategies. Two of them used a wide range of the strategies that were taught in the course on innovative teaching strategies such a diamond ranking, the traffic light game, the compass rose and the four-corner-method, while the other confined himself to using role play. This does not mean that the other teacher students did not use strategies, but it seems they did not experience it as the expert knowledge they brought into the cooperation. Sometimes it seemed they rather felt quite unequipped, especially when NGOs had somewhat fixed expectations in relation to the question of the teaching principles. These included for example that the proposals should enable them to hold workshops using activating teaching strategies or that they preferred a flexible modular system they could use from year 7 to 11 (or ages 12 to 17).

The component of the social purpose was not felt as a problem by most of the teacher students. This may be due to the good reputation of NGOs as discussed above or to the fact that all three NGOs were more specialized in education than others, but it may also be due to the teacher students' limited experience of school reality. Interestingly enough, in the beginning of the course two of the teacher students did voice concern that they might be expected to interpret their topic from a more religious perspective, but these fears did not materialize – rather to the opposite they felt they had received a lot of support and been granted a lot of freedom at the same time.

Overall the teacher students said that although the project was time consuming, it was also very fruitful and offered them new experiences they would not want to miss. One teacher student was extremely happy with the long and lively discussions he had with his partner. Nevertheless a number of teacher students felt that the cooperation between the university and the NGOs could be intensified in the form that members of the NGOs take part in one of the first and one of the last sessions of the course, at the beginning to introduce their work to the group and at the end to share the results of all teacher students.

## **Conclusion**

As stated before the then proposed curricula of the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg propose to seek collaborations with NGOs when teaching sustainability or global learning (BE-BB 2014). From a structural point of view this suggestion amounts to a privatization of education: NGOs may be - and in our view are - an important part of civil society voicing concerns that might otherwise not be heard, but they are not democratically legitimized (Möllers 2009). The integration of NGOs into the formal educational system thus necessitates teachers to first know about NGOs and their contributions to societal debates and second be able to reflect the challenges and

opportunities of collaboration. This in turn is a question of professional development that – at least in Germany – can best be achieved during ITE as later on teachers usually have little time and energy to venture into big projects like an engaged cooperation with an NGO and a profound evaluation of assets and drawbacks.

For a successful cooperation of teacher training institutions or schools with NGOs the most important prerequisite seems to be an open approach on both sides. Both partners have strengths that can be combined to reach a common goal which is to acquaint young people to issues of sustainable development. The strengths – but also the weaknesses – that both partners brought to the cooperation were most clearly seen by the more reflective teacher students. These more critical teacher students are those that are desperately needed to succeed in educating future citizens who are able to analyse and judge controversial issues. It is therefore advisable not to deny the different perspectives of the formal education system and the NGOs. To use these differences efficiently both sides need to be able to understand the needs of the other, which also entails entering into an intensive communication process. Unfortunately, this is very often seen as very time consuming, especially considering restricted resources on both sides. Nevertheless, the time seems well invested as the feedback from the teacher students clearly indicates that what was valued most was the possibility to learn about new perspectives which helped them shape their own ideas.

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